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SUBJECT: DETAINED VIET TAN MEMBERS RELEASED; NGUYEN QUOC QUAN
REMAINS UNDER DETENTION

Ref: Hanoi 389

1.(SBU) Three members of the opposition Viet Tan Party (aka Vietnam Reform Party) party apparently detained in Ho Chi Minh City while trying to visit fellow Viet Tan members including Amcit Nguyen Quoc Quan (reftel) left Vietnam over the weekend, reportedly released by the GVN and expelled from the country. According to contacts outside of Vietnam and the Viet Tan website, the three, Amcit Mr. Mai Huu Bao, Swiss citizen Ms. Nguyen Thi Xuan Trang and Australian citizen Nguyen Tan Anh, were detained the morning of April 3 when taking food and medicine to the detention facility where Nguyen Quoc Quan and the others were being held.

12. (SBU) Poloff heard from Swiss Embassy April 6 that there were unconfirmed reports that the three had been released. ConOff confirmed that Mai Huu Bao had departed Vietnam via Hong Kong and on April 7 a friend of Mr. Bao confirmed to ConGen HCMC ConOff that he had arrived safely in Los Angeles.

13. According to an April 5 Viet Tan press release (forwarded to EAP/MLS) the three individuals were released 48 hours after being detained on April 3 at the Ministry of Public Security detention center in HCMC, where they had gone to visit imprisoned Viet Tan members Nguyen Quoc Quan, Somsak Khunmi, Nguyen The Vu and Nguyen Viet Trung.

14. (SBU) According to the press release: "The request to make a humanitarian visit was not granted by prison officials. Instead, the three Viet Tan members were illegally held at the detention facility, had their mobile phones confiscated, and were prevented from having any communication with the outside. After they had gone missing for 24 hours, their friends alerted the Swiss, American and Australian consulates which made inquiries with Vietnamese authorities. Unable to fabricate or produce any criminal charges stemming from this humanitarian visit, the Hanoi government had to release the three individuals."

15. (SBU) Comment: Given that it is well known that even family members are not normally granted access to prisoners under investigation in Vietnam, it is probable that these three individuals understood that they would not gain access to their imprisoned colleagues, but rather hoped to peacefully highlight their cause. The Vietnamese decision to expel these individuals was calculated to limit international attention to the situation. Nguyen Quoc Quan remains in detention. We hope to undertake another consular visit soon, and continue to call for his release.

16. (U) This cable was coordinated with ConGen HCMC.

MICHALAK